

Message Text

CONFIDENTIAL

PAGE 01 DAMASC 02363 01 OF 03 131516Z
ACTION NEA-10

INFO OCT-01 EUR-12 ISO-00 SSM-03 CIAE-00 PM-04 H-01
INR-07 L-03 NSAE-00 NSC-05 PA-01 PRS-01 SP-02
SS-15 USIA-06 IO-13 ACDA-07 TRSE-00 AID-05 AF-10
/106 W

-----131733Z 055383 /40

R 131354Z APR 77
FM AMEMBASSY DAMASCUS
TO SECSTATE WASHDC 2649
INFO AMEMBASSY AMMAN
USINT BAGHDAD
AMEMBASSY BEIRUT
AMEMBASSY CAIRO
AMCONSUL JERUSALEM
AMEMBASSY JIDDA
AMEMBASSY KUWAIT
AMEMBASSY LONDON
AMEMBASSY MOSCOW
AMEMBASSY TEL AVIV
AMEMBASSY TRIPOLI
DIA WASHDC
SECDEF WASHDC
USCINCEUR

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 1 OF 3 DAMASCUS 2363

E.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: PFOR, SY, PLO, LE
SUBJECT: SYRO-PLO RELATIONS FOLLOWING PNC

REF: A. DAMASCUS 1770, B. CAIRO 5338

1. SUMMARY: PLO INITIATIVES TO HEAL RELATIONS WITH SYRIA ARE
PROVING SUCCESSFUL DESPITE ONGOING STRAINS. IMPROVEMENT OVER
SITUATION EXISTING IN MID-FEBRUARY WHEN SYRIAN ATTACKS ON
PALESTINIAN CAMPS APPEARED IMMINENT HAS BEEN SIGNIFICANT.
CONFIDENTIAL

CONFIDENTIAL

PAGE 02 DAMASC 02363 01 OF 03 131516Z

NEAR CONFRONTATION SOBERED BOTH SIDES AND LED ARAFAT TO TRY
TO PLACATE SARG INCLUDING ACCOMMODATING MANY SYRIAN CONCERNS
RELATING TO PNC. SYRIANS WERE PRIMARILY CONCERNED TO ENCOURAGE
EMERGENCE OF "MODERATE" PLO" LEADERSHIP AND TO DEFLECT
CRITICISM OF SYRIAN POLICIES AT PNC; THEY WERE NOT ADVOCATING
SPECIFIC POLICY CHANGES. SYRIANS SEEK FROM PLO
FLEXIBILITY AND WILLINGNESS TO COOPERATE WITH SYRIAN POLICES

BOTH IN STABILIZATION OF LEBANON AND IN SEARCH FOR MIDEAST PEACE. MOST IMPRESSIVE EVIDENCE TO DATE THAT SYRO-PLO RELATIONS HAVE IMPROVED HAS BEEN TACIT SYRIAN SUPPORT FOR FEDAYEEN OFFENSIVE IN SOUTH LEBANON AFTER MONTHS OF ACQUIESCING IN ATTACKS BY ISRAELI-SUPPORTED RIGHTIST MILITIAS LARGELY AGAINST PLO REJECTIONISTS. ANOTHER SUCH INDICATION WAS FONMIN KHADDAM'S CHAMPIONING OF PALESTINIAN CAUSE AT NON-ALIGNED CONFERENCE IN DELHI. SEVERAL IMPORTANT ISSUES REMAIN UNRESOLVED THAT COULD THREATEN THIS NEW-FOUND COOPERATION. MOST IMMEDIATE TEST WILL COME OVER INTERPRETATION OF CAIRO AGREEMENT WHERE PLO MAY HAVE KUWAITI AND SAUDI BACKING FOR MORE LENIENT INTERPRETATION THAN FIRST PROPOSED BY SARG AND GOL. IF SYRO-PLO RELATIONSHIP CLEARS THIS HURDLE, PROCEDURAL QUESTIONS RELATING PALESTINIAN PARTICIPATION PEACE PROCESS WILL TEST IT FURTHER. END SUMMARY

2. RENEWED SYRO-PLO COOPERATION IN SOUTH LEBANON INDICATES THAT INITIATIVE UNDERTAKEN BY PLO TO REPAIR BREACH WITH SYRIA PRIOR TO PNC HAS GAINED SOME MOMENTUM. EFFORTS BY ARAFAT AT PNC TO CONTAIN DAMAGE CAUSED BY VERBAL ATTACKS ON SYRIAN POLICY IN LEBANON REFLECTED DESIRE BY PLO MODERATES TO REESTABLISH WORKING RELATIONSHIP WITH SARG IN SPITE OF ONGOING TENSIONS. MOST SIGNIFICANT EVIDENCE OF NEW, AND AT THIS STAGE, TENTATIVE SPIRIT COOPERATION INCLUDES:

A. STRONG BACKING FROM ARAFAT FOR RELECTION OF PNC CHAIRMAN KHALID FAHUM IN FACE OF CONSIDERABLE OPPOSITION,
CONFIDENTIAL

CONFIDENTIAL

PAGE 03 DAMASC 02363 01 OF 03 131516Z

B. OPENING OF PLO-JORDANIAN DIALOGUE,

C. VIGILANCE OF ARAFAT AND HIS LIEUTENANTS DURING PNC TO CONTAIN INFLAMMATORY CIRTICISM OF SYRIA,

D. DISAPPEARANCE FROM SYRIAN MEDIA OF CRITICISM DIRECTED AGAINST ARAFAT AND PLO WITH LEBANESE RIGHTWING SUPPLANTING PLO AS SYRIAN BETE NOIRE IN LEBANON,

E. REPORTED APPOINTMENT OF TOP ARAFAT LIEUTENANT KHALIL AL-WAZIR (ABU JIHAD) TO HANDLE SUBSTANTIVE ASPECTS OF SYRO-PLO RELATIONS,

F. LIMITED COOPERATION IN SOUTH LEBANON BETWEEN SAIQA AND FATAH FORCES AND SYRIAN ACQUIESCENCE OR ASSISTANE IN ALLOWING TRANSFER OF SOME NON-REJECTIONIST FEDAYEEN TROOPS AND THEIR EQUIPMENT TO SOUTH LEBANON.

G. TWO RECENT LENGTHY MEETINGS BETWEEN ASAD AND ARAFAT AND
KEY EXCOMM MEMBERS.

3. THESE SIGNS OF LIMITED COOPERATION BETWEEN SARG AND
PLO REPRESENT SIGNIFICANT CHANGE IN SITUATION EXISTING AS
RECENTLY AS MID-FEBRUARY, WHEN ARAFAT'S DRAMATIC APPEAL
TO ASAD HALTED SYRIAN TROOPS POISED TO ATTACK PALESTINIAN
CAMPS ON OUTSKIRTS OF BEIRUT. IN RETROSPECT THIS INCIDENT PROBABLY
REPRESENTED LATEST TURNING POINT IN SYRO-PLO RELATIONS, AFTER THIS
CONFRONTATION AND FOLLOWING PNC, SAIQA/FATAH CONTACTS AND
CONSULTATIONS INCREASED AND SYRIAN MEDIA CEASED TO STRESS
DETERMINATION TO COLLECT ALL HEAVY WEAPONS IN LEBANON;
INSTEAD, REBUILDING LEBANESE ARMY AND APPLICATION OF CAIRO ACCORDS
BECAME FOCUS OF SYRIAN EDITORIALS.

4. AS PREVIOUSLY REPORTED SYRIA EXERTED STRENUOUS EFFORTS
BEFORE PNC TO INCREASE ITS INFLUENCE WITHIN PLO POLICY-
CONFIDENTIAL

CONFIDENTIAL

PAGE 04 DAMASC 02363 01 OF 03 131516Z

MAKING COUNCILS. IT WAS ALSO CONCERNED THAT CRITICISM
OF SYRIA WOULD BECOME IMPORTANT FOCUS OF PNC. ARAFAT TRIED
BEFORE AND DURING PNC TO ACCOMMODATE SYRIAN CONCERNS WHILE
PRESSING PLO INDEPENDENCE. PNC WAS EXPANDED TO INCLUDE MORE
MODERATES, ALTHOUGH ARAFAT SEEMED TO BENEFIT MORE THAN
SYRIA FROM CHANGES WHICH ORIGINALLY APPEARED DIRECTED AT
DILUTING HIS LEADERSHIP. AT PNC, ARAFAT DID NOT PERMIT
ATTACKS ON SYRIA TO GO UNANSWERED OR GET OUT OF HAND. WHILE
HE DID THWART SAAIQA CAMPAIGN TO GARNER ADDITIONAL
SEATS ON EXCOMM (SAMI ATTARI AND MAHMUD AZZAM WERE CANDIDATES),
HE COMPENSATED SYRIA BY EXCLUDING PFLP FROM EXCOMM
AND DRIVING WEDGE INTO REJECTIONIST RANKS.

CONFIDENTIAL

NNN

CONFIDENTIAL

PAGE 01 DAMASC 02363 02 OF 03 131610Z
ACTION NEA-10

INFO OCT-01 EUR-12 ISO-00 SSM-03 CIAE-00 PM-04 H-01
INR-07 L-03 NSAE-00 NSC-05 PA-01 PRS-01 SP-02
SS-15 USIA-06 IO-13 ACDA-07 TRSE-00 AID-05 AF-10
/106 W

-----131732Z 056099 /40

R 131354Z APR 77
FM AMEMBASSY DAMASCUS
TO SECSTATE WASHDC 2650
INFO AMEMBASSY AMMAN
USINT BAGHDAD
AMEMBASSY BEIRUT
AMEMBASSY CAIRO
AMCONSUL JERUSALEM
AMEMBASSY JIDDA
AMEMBASSY KUWAIT
AMEMBASSY LONDON
AMEMBASSY MOSCOW
AMEMBASSY TEL AVIV
AMEMBASSY TRIPOLI
DIA WASHDC
SECDEF WASHDC
USCINCEUR

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 2 OF 3 DAMASCUS 2363

5. NEITHER BEFORE NOR DURING PNC DID SYRIAN MEDIA ADVOCATE ADOPTION SPECIFIC SUBSTANTIVE POLICIES SUCH AS ACCEPTANCE UN RES 242 OR 338 OR AMENDING NATIONAL CHARTER. SARG APPEARED MORE CONCERNED WITH NATURE OF LEADERSHIP TO EMERGE FROM PNC AND WITH PREVENTING CONCESSIONS TO RADICALS. AT BEGINNING OF CONFERENCE SENIOR BAATH COLUMNIST WROTE," CONCILIATORY FORMULAS USED FOR CHOOSING PLO EXCOMM NO LONGER IN HARMONY WITH REQUIREMENT OF THE STAGE NOR WITH DEVELOPMENT OF PALESTINIAN STRUGGLES," A CALL FOR EXCLUDING REJECTIONISTS FROM TOP LEADERSHIP
CONFIDENTIAL

CONFIDENTIAL

PAGE 02 DAMASC 02363 02 OF 03 131610Z

POSITIONS. SYRIAN MEDIA DISPLAYED UNUSUAL SENSITIVITY ON ONLY ONE POLICY QUESTION--PLO CONTACTS WITH ISRAELI DOVES. NUMBER OF EDITORIALS APPEARED SHARPLY CRITICAL OF SUCH CONTACTS EVIDENCING SARG FEARS THAT PALESTINIANS MIGHT ACHIEVE BREAKTHROUGH WITH ISRAELIS AT SYRIAN EXPENSE. SYRIANS AIM AND HOPE WAS TO HAVE LEADERSHIP WITH SUFFICIENT FLEXIBILITY AND AUTHORITY TO TAKE MAJOR DECISIONS REGARDING THE PEACE PROCESS IN COORDINATION WITH PARTICIPATING ARAB STATES. GIVEN COMPOSITION OF EXCOMM AND ITS REPORTED AUTHORITY TO GO BEYOND 15--POINT POLICY DECLARATION, IT WOULD APPEAR SYRIA CAN TAKE SOME SATISFACTORY STEPS .

6. SYRIAN OFFICIALS REMAIN TIGHT-LIPPED ABOUT WHAT THEY EXPECT FROM PLO. MEDIA'S ONLY COMMENTARY ON SUBJECT SINCE PNC APPEARED IN MARCH 25 THAWRA IN ARTICLE CALLING UPON EXCOMM TO FOLLOW FIVE GENERAL PRINCIPLES:

A. ACHIEVEMENT OF NATIONAL UNITY AND ADOPTION OF

COHERENT PROGRAM OF NATIONAL ACTION,

B. DEVELOPMENT OF STRONGEST RELATIONS POSSIBLE
WITH CONFRONTATION STATES AND ADOPTION OF STABLE
STRATEGY TO GOVERN SUCH RELATIONS,

C. ACHIEVEMENT OF LEGITIMATE AND UNITED PLO
REPRESENTATION IN ALL EFFORTS AIMED AT ACHIEVING JUST
AND LASTING PEACE IN AREA,

D. CONCENTRATION OF REVOLUTIONARY ACTIVITIES IN
THE OCCUPIED TERRITORIES TO ESPECIALLY INCLUDE ARMED
STRUGGLE, AND

E. REJECTION OF ANY SETTLEMENT WHICH DISREGARDS
PALESTINIAN PEOPLE'S RIGHTS AND CONTINUATION OF STRUGGLE
FOR RECOGNITION OF PLO AS SOLE LEGITIMATE REP OF
PALESTINIAN PEOPLE.
CONFIDENTIAL

CONFIDENTIAL

PAGE 03 DAMASC 02363 02 OF 03 131610Z

7. MOST IMPRESSIVE INDICATION OF RENEWED COOPERATION
BETWEEN SYRIA AND PLO HAS BEEN CONSULTATION ON DEVELOPMENTS
IN SOUTH LEBANON AND SYRIAN APPROVAL OF FEDAYEEN COUNTER-
OFFENSIVE TO RETAKE TAIBEH AND AL-KHAIM. WHEN RIGHTWING
FORCES BEGAN EXPANDING SECURITY BELT IN SOUTH LEBANON,
SYRIA INITIALLY SEEMED WILLING TO ALLOW CHRISTIANS TO INFLICT
CASUALTIES ON DEFENDING REJECTIONIST FORCES, OR EVEN
OCCASIONALLY TO ASSIST BY INSTIGATING SAIQA ATTACKS ON
REJECTIONIST FORCES (NABATIYEH) AND INTERDICTING FEDAYEEN
MEN AND SUPPLIED TO THE SOUTH. HOWEVER, AS ISRAELI-
SUPPORTED FORCES THREATENED TO ACHIEVE THEIR GOALS,
AND SYRIAN WARNINGS TO CHRISTIANS TO BREAK OFF
RELATIONS WITH ISRAEL WENT UNHEEDED, SYRIA POSED NO
OBJECTION TO FATAH AND SAIQA FORCES JOINING PALESTINIAN-
LEFTIST COUNTER-OFFENSIVE, WE AGREE WITH ISRAELI VIEW
THAT THIS DECISION WAS PROBABLY TAKEN AT ASAD-ARAFAT MEETING
MARCH 31. SHORTLY AFTER SECOND ASAD-ARAFAT MEETING
APRIL 9, ARAFAT ANNOUNCED ORDERS FOR HIS FORCES TO OBSERVE
CEASEFIRE IN SOUTH, RESULT WHICH ASAD HAD IMPLICITLY PREDICTED
TO AMBASSADOR A FEW HOURS BEFORE HE SAW ARAFAT.

CONFIDENTIAL

NNN

CONFIDENTIAL

PAGE 01 DAMASC 02363 03 OF 03 131557Z
ACTION NEA-10

INFO OCT-01 EUR-12 ISO-00 SSM-03 CIAE-00 PM-04 H-01
INR-07 L-03 NSAE-00 NSC-05 PA-01 PRS-01 SP-02
SS-15 USIA-06 IO-13 ACDA-07 TRSE-00 AID-05 AF-10
/106 W

-----131732Z 055949 /40

R 131354Z APR 77
FM AMEMBASSY DAMASCUS
TO SECSTATE WASHDC 2651
INFO AMEMBASSY AMMAN
USINT BAGHDAD
AMEMBASSY BEIRUT
AMEMBASSY CAIRO
AMCONSUL JERUSALEM
AMEMBASSY JIDDA
AMEMBASSY KUWAIT
AMEMBASSY LONDON
AMEMBASSY MOSCOW
AMEMBASSY TEL AVIV
AMEMBASSY TRIPOLI
DIA WASHDC
SECDEF WASHDC
USCINCEUR

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 3 OF 3 DAMASCUS 2363

8. MEANWHILE, IN INTERNATIONAL AREANA, FONMIN KHADDAM
DELIVERED SPEECH AT NEW DELHI NACCFM APRIL 8 EMPHASIZING THAT
"PLO PARTICIPATION IN SEEKING SETTLEMENT TO ME PROBLEM IS
FUNDAMENTAL CONDITION WITHOUT WHICH NO PROGRESS TOWARDS
PEACE CAN BE ACCOMPLISHED."

9. DESPITE THIS TREND TOWARD NORMALIZATION OF RELATIONS
BETWEEN SARG AND PLO, NUMBER OF IMPORTANT ISSUES
REMAIN UNRESOLVED BETWEEN THEM. IMPLEMENTATION OF CAIRO
ACCORDS HAS AGAIN BECOME MAJOR THEME IN SYRIAN PRESS. AL-BAATH
CONFIDENTIAL

CONFIDENTIAL

PAGE 02 DAMASC 02363 03 OF 03 131557Z

EDITORIAL HAS ASSERTED THAT IMPLEMENTATION SHOULD NOT AWAIT
REBUILDING OF LEBANESE ARMY. PALESTINIAN INFLEXIBILITY TOWARD
PROCEDURAL QUESTIONS RELATING TO GENEVA MEPC ALSO
REMAINS POTENTIALLY DIVISIVE ISSUE. ON SYRIAN SIE, HOWEVER,
KHADDAM'S REMARKS TO FORMER VP ROCKEFELLER THAT "ARAFAT
IS THE ACCEPTED LEADER; THE PALESTINIANS REFUSE TUTELAGE
OF ANY ARAB COUNTRY," SUGGESTS RYAINS AGAIN CONSIDER
ARAFAT UNDISPUTED LEADER OF PALESTINAINS AND MAY HAVE

REASSESSED EXTENT OF THEIR ABILITY TO INFLUENCE PLO DECISIONS. UNQUESTIONABLY, ARAFAT HAS BEEN STRENGTHENED IN FUTURE DEALINGS WITH SYRIA BY HIS REELECTION AS CHAIRMAN OF PLO EXCOMM AND POPULAR RECEPTION THAT DECISION HAS RECEIVED AMONG MOST PALESTINAINS. HE HAS ALSO GAINED VALUABLE ALLIES WITHIN QUADRIPARTITE COMMITTEE, AND WARM RECEPTION HE RECEIVED IN MOSCOW HAS FURTHER BOOSTED HIS STANDING.

10. IN SUMMARY CURRENT SYRO-PLO RELATIONS SHOW CONSIDERABLE EVIDENCE OF IMPROVEMENT OVER SITUATION PREVAILING AS LITTLE AS SIX WEEKS AGO. WHAT IS LESS CLEAR IS EXTENT TO WHICH IMPROVEMENT IS BASED MERELY ON TACTICAL CONSIDERATIONS, SUCH AS COMMON INTEREST IN PREVENTING ISRAEL FROM ESTABLISHING CHRISTIAN CORDON SANITARE UNDER ITS CONTROL IN SOUTH LEBANON, AND SYRIA'S DESIRE TO ENLIST PALESTINIAN SUPPORT FOR CENTRIST COALITION TO UNDERPIN SARKIS. STRENGTH OF RECONCILIATION WILL BE TESTED BY MANNER IN WHICH PARTIES DEAL WITH INEVITABLE STRAINS WHICH WILL ARISE AS SYRIA AND LEBANON MOVE AHEAD TO IMPLEMENT CAIRO ACCORD. INITIAL POSITION OF SARG AND GOL SEEMS MORE PUNITIVE THAN PLO CAN ACCEPT. SYRIAN WILLINGNESS TO SOFTEN ITS PREVIOUS POSITION AND PLO FLEXIBILITY IN ACCOMMODATING ITSELF TO TIGHTER REGULATION OF ITS PRESNECE IN LEBANON WILL GIE GOOD INDICATION THAT RELATIONSHIP HAS SOLID STRATEGIC ROOTS.

11. IT IS A TRIBUTE TO ARAFAT'S RESILIENCE THAT WITHSO FEW ASSETS HE HAS BEEN ABLE TO PARLAY MAJOR
CONFIDENTIAL

CONFIDENTIAL

PAGE 03 DAMASC 02363 03 OF 03 131557Z

RECONCILIATION WITH SYRIANS, HIS PRINCIPAL ARAB THREAT, WHO AS LITTLE AS SIX WEEKS AGO WERE ARRAYED IN THE FILED AGAINST HIM. HIS ABILITY TO CAPITALIZE ON THIS RECONCILIATION WILL SOON BE TESTED AFRESH AS HE DEALS WITH INEVITABLE SYRIAN-PALESTINIAN STRAINS ARISING FROM APPLICATION OF CAIRO ACCORDS IN LEBANON AND PALESTINIAN PARTICIPATION IN ME PEACE TALKS.
PELLETREAU

CONFIDENTIAL

NNN

Message Attributes

Automatic Decaptioning: X
Capture Date: 01-Jan-1994 12:00:00 am
Channel Indicators: n/a
Current Classification: UNCLASSIFIED
Concepts: FOREIGN RELATIONS, POLITICAL SITUATION
Control Number: n/a
Copy: SINGLE
Sent Date: 13-Apr-1977 12:00:00 am
Decaption Date: 01-Jan-1960 12:00:00 am
Decaption Note:
Disposition Action: RELEASED
Disposition Approved on Date:
Disposition Case Number: n/a
Disposition Comment: 25 YEAR REVIEW
Disposition Date: 22 May 2009
Disposition Event:
Disposition History: n/a
Disposition Reason:
Disposition Remarks:
Document Number: 1977DAMASC02363
Document Source: CORE
Document Unique ID: 00
Drafter: n/a
Enclosure: n/a
Executive Order: GS
Errors: N/A
Expiration:
Film Number: D770128-0534
Format: TEL
From: DAMASCUS
Handling Restrictions: n/a
Image Path:
ISecure: 1
Legacy Key: link1977/newtext/t19770463/aaaaccfq.tel
Line Count: 374
Litigation Code IDs:
Litigation Codes:
Litigation History:
Locator: TEXT ON-LINE, ON MICROFILM
Message ID: 3d6235a6-c288-dd11-92da-001cc4696bcc
Office: ACTION NEA
Original Classification: CONFIDENTIAL
Original Handling Restrictions: n/a
Original Previous Classification: n/a
Original Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Page Count: 7
Previous Channel Indicators: n/a
Previous Classification: CONFIDENTIAL
Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Reference: 77 DAMASCUS 1770, 77 CAIRO 5338
Retention: 0
Review Action: RELEASED, APPROVED
Review Content Flags:
Review Date: 31-Jan-2005 12:00:00 am
Review Event:
Review Exemptions: n/a
Review Media Identifier:
Review Release Date: n/a
Review Release Event: n/a
Review Transfer Date:
Review Withdrawn Fields: n/a
SAS ID: 2824565
Secure: OPEN
Status: NATIVE
Subject: SYRO-PLO RELATIONS FOLLOWING PNC
TAGS: PFOR, SY, LE, PLO
To: STATE
Type: TE
vdkgvwkey: odbc://SAS/SAS.dbo.SAS_Docs/3d6235a6-c288-dd11-92da-001cc4696bcc
Review Markings:
Margaret P. Grafeld
Declassified/Released
US Department of State
EO Systematic Review
22 May 2009
Markings: Margaret P. Grafeld Declassified/Released US Department of State EO Systematic Review 22 May 2009